

Written in stones

A Margary Grant investigation by Mike Seager Thomas



Peter Drewett

of the chalk strata in this area, features which if not recognised as natural could be mistaken as archaeological.



Photos: (left) Society members excavating the chalk dump to the north of the Saxon(?) rampart (in background); (right) Excavating chalk from the Saxon(?) ditch dumped in the top of Caburn Bottom

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Best of all though would be if we could assume the existence of a word **dēm* 'judging', which would be a regular formation from *dōm* 'judgement', *dēman* 'to judge', although it does not appear in the record. It would have had a genitive case form **dēmes*; the whole name containing it, **Dēmes-ford*, would have meant 'ford of judging'. The spellings with 'd' instead of 's' would be related to a known quirk of Anglo-Norman pronunciation which gave for instance English *medlar* from earlier French *meslier*.

RICHARD COATES

Slightly less than one third of the deposits excavated last year at Eastbourne College of Arts and Technology yielded finds of humanly-transported stone. The Iron Age assemblage included finds from as far afield as Kent and West Sussex; such data are not unusual, but due to a limited knowledge

of the stone itself, their interpretative potential often goes unrealised, most notably in the area of site-resource strategies (including trade), stone uses and feature interpretation.

Though intrinsically undatable, stone lends itself to archaeological inquiry. In our region there is great variability. Different properties recommend it for a variety of uses. It outlasts many other finds categories and may retain evidence of the processes to which it has been subject. With the help of a grant from the Margary Fund, the writer has been investigating it.

Stone from nearly 100 natural exposures throughout Sussex and into the adjoining counties was collected. Where distinguishable, most stone types proved to outcrop over a wide area and in a variety of situations: road cuttings, surface exposures (e.g. in tree-throw holes) and quarries. For example, a distinctive facies of the Lower Greensand usually identified with an Iron Age and Roman quarry at Lodsworth was identified in the spoil from old workings at Dene Dip, two miles away. A rotary quern of this stone was found at ECAT. Often, however, individual hand samples of quite different and widely separated stone types proved indistinguishable. For such material to be distinguished within a site-artefact assemblage a large sample would be required.

In order to identify the changes which result from different firing and cooling conditions, a sub-sample from this collection was burnt. All stone types

fractured in a predictable way. Flint was calcined, the higher the temperature the whiter it became. Iron-rich stone turned red if the fire was oxygen-rich, blue/grey if not. Sandstones often became friable. Quenching, though it did not induce any visible changes itself, would freeze any which were already taking place, occasionally resulting in a sharp colour

difference across a stone.

Results from observations made during this work are being used in the interpretation of several Sussex prehistoric site-artefact assemblages and are already proving interesting. Firstly, stone types from West Sussex and the High Weald have been recognized on middle Bronze Age sites in East Sussex. Far-reaching contacts during the late Bronze Age indicated by the presence on Downland sites of non-local clay or pottery were clearly pre-existing. Secondly, stone finds from Kent do not appear to occur until the later Iron Age. This indicates a *change* in site-resource strategies. Thirdly, many of the assemblages are dominated by burnt material, which has implications both for our understanding of stone function and for the interpretation of the contexts in which these finds occur.

Members interested in stone who would like to be involved in this project — specifically in the collection and burning of stone — should contact the writer on 01273 4****.

Photos: Bronze Age saddle-querns from New Barn Down, Worthing. (Curwen working papers)

